

EXPONENT II

SHARING MORMON WOMEN'S VOICES SINCE 1974



COVER ART

THE AVIARY OF THE REVEREND WILLIAM J. LONG

SHAE WARNICK

Shae Warnick's latest works deal with perceptions that might be distancing people from nature. Shae approaches these dialogues as a layperson with unquenchable curiosity, trying to find a balance between science and sentiment, believing that a thoughtful consideration of both sides will engender a more tempered, truthful, and inviting outlook on the natural world. In her installation "The Aviary of the Reverend William J. Long," Shae examines the good and the bad of our human tendency to anthropomorphize the world around us.

@shaewarnick

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Exponent II provides a forum for Mormon women to share their life experiences in an atmosphere of trust and acceptance. This exchange allows us to better understand each other and shape the direction of our lives. Our common bond is our connection to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and our commitment to women. We publish this magazine as a living history in celebration of the strength and diversity of women.



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We are always looking for artwork and photography to accompany our writing. Please send art submissions to exponentiart@gmail.com. If you are interested in illustrating articles, please contact us for specific assignments.

SPECIAL THANKS

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New Perspectives

EMILY FISHER GRAY

The orderly German countryside whizzes past my window as I write this. I am on a fast train traveling from a meeting in Strasbourg, France, to my temporary new home in Berlin. Around me, the keys click on computer keyboards as professional women and men in suits prepare their important documents and presentations. A phone rings and a hurried conversation ensues, promptly hushed by several people who stand up and point to the sign: *Ruhebereich* — quiet car. We are in Germany, and rules are rules, and the only acceptable conversations are those taking place between these people in suits and their laptops.

My university offered me the opportunity to spend a semester teaching at our program in Berlin, and after much soul-searching and family discussion, I accepted. This would be a great adventure for my two teenagers and a needed change in perspective and environment for all of us. We

This period of freedom from our regular life is refreshing, but I miss my dog and my chickens. I miss watching the leaves change on the hillsides around my small town.

have lived in rural Vermont for more than a decade; my children have attended the same small school since Kindergarten with the same tight-knit group of friends. Now they would live in an apartment building, ride the subway to school, and eat chocolate croissants fresh from the bakery. I would give up all of the many official and unofficial university responsibilities that have gradually built up like barnacles on the hull of an old boat. This period of freedom from our regular life is refreshing, but I miss my dog and my chickens. I miss watching the leaves change on the hillsides around my small town. I even miss a few of my regular university obligations.

My world shifts constantly between the familiar and the utterly strange. The apothecary on the corner recoils in horror when I ask about cold medication — I'd forgotten that in Germany, you are expected to just tough it out. I walk through the grocery store mentally adjusting my standard

recipes, hoping that my son will think grated gouda is about the same as cheddar on the tacos he requested for his birthday dinner, wondering if I can substitute baking powder for unavailable baking soda and chop a chocolate bar into something resembling chips for cookies. On Sundays, we attend church in a three-story ward building that has a full-sized stage behind the rostrum and no basketball hoops. The Primary is desperate for help and I have already received a calling to work with the 7-year-olds — the same calling I held back home. The German children draw me pictures. Their mothers and fathers gather around my little family, offering us community in exile. I am reminded, again, of what my church does so well.

This issue of *Exponent II* is full of insightful journeys. A Relief Society President skips Sunday School for an essential trip to Costco. A nursing mother dodges crowds, rocks, and taxidermy to find some place in the universe where she can feed her baby in peace. Cori Smith Elzey navigates the language barrier with her Chinese neighbors. Bethany Brady Spalding takes her daughter to the Australian Outback and Indian soccer fields in search of a meaningful way to mark her passage into young womanhood. Ellen Fagg Weist retraces the steps of her pioneer foremother while book reviewer Rebekah Orton glimpses the irreversible progress of her child's growth.

This issue also reminds us that we do not need to change our location in time or space to change our perspective. Brittney Hartley and poet Nain Christopherson go in search of Heavenly Mother and discover some unexpected insights that challenge our accustomed categories. The artist K Dawn asks why white LDS progressives invite her to join us at our table rather than pulling up a chair to hers. And I will not give away any details of Laura Marostica's moving short story *The Parlor* except to say that making the acquaintance of the Deputy Mayor has profoundly changed me in ways I cannot let go. I hope that you, too, will pause in your journey, pull up a chair to join the women in these pages, and look around yourself to discover a world that is bigger, stranger, and more familiar than before.



Nursing Near Meteorites

KOSELI CUMMINGS

We've been here for only a minute. I glance down at my red-faced infant. The desperation on his face echoes the ache in my breasts. If we don't find a place to nurse in t-minus 15 seconds, we'll both explode.

We breeze through life size bears and loin-clothed gatherers, skim Southeast Asia's history detailed through colorful pots, and cast a glance at man's first apparition, neanderthal, hardly impressed. Could he lactate? No? Then we're not stopping. The jungle lures us, but only for a minute. Every kind of insect is pinned to the wall, encased in floor to ceiling glass. Scarlet red, vibrant green, canary yellow mapped by size and wingspan. *This is kind of incredible*, I think. Something most people despise turned colorful, crunchy artwork. My thoughts are interrupted by a burning, heavy feeling. *We have to hurry*,



ARTIST STATEMENT

This body of work deals with the relationship between two worlds, our physical environment and the world we are unable to see. Using rocks as a tool to connect with something greater than ourselves, Baum covers rocks in glass and uses these objects as a starting point for her photographic works and video pieces. Baum believes the longevity and culmination of history within these objects provides proof of divine experience. These works explore elements of different spiritual practices, such as encasing sacred objects in glass, while handling the absurdity of protecting something that is virtually unbreakable.

I tell Keenan. *If no one else were here I'd nurse topless next to that taxidermied tiger, I think to myself.*

As fellow mammals, we ooh and ahh at the two gazillion pound whale levitating near the ceiling and speed walk the perimeter of the Ocean Room. We will huff and puff two-year-old Silas from glass case to glass case. We're

not missing anything.

A deep inhale floods my brain to my fingertips. It hits me.

Just like the crunchy insects, the neanderthals, the giant blue whale, the buffalo: I provide life. I am nature.

We came to see the world's natural history, and we are not leaving until our two year old has exhausted himself seeing the world's natural history. We've been here before, moving at the same

short-attention-span speed. We've been here before, but at a different speed, a leisurely couple without a child to chase and a baby attached.

I've been here before, at my own speed. Surrounded by these freeze frames of nature, now fixed in rooms and glass cases, I am suddenly running through my own memories. I am moving even faster, the world around me is alive, and I am alone. For a moment or maybe hours, I drift to where and when I wasn't navigating a universe of urgency.

I am running down the hilly street. Sky high cottonwood trees wave overhead, and I lope through waves of warm and cool air. Head forward, I shake out my arms, even as my legs effortlessly pump forward. The canal road wraps for miles along my hometown, a light green vein in a small rural town inevitably turning suburban. But I rarely see others on it. I often wish I'd pass other runners, or even walkers. Why aren't there more people out on every perfect summer night?

I run alone but the air buzzes with summer life. Horses graze in pastures to the left as I steer around a testy gaggle of geese and their droppings. I burst through low hanging clouds of gnats swarming under the oldest tree in the town — a massive oak with gnarled roots. Its branches stretch out over the green water. I flinch and brush a mosquito from my neck. I feel my muscles loosening and my legs speeding up. I lean in and feel my heart pounding, lips slightly apart, eyes focused ahead. I'm on my toes, strides lengthened and smooth, in this rhythm I could run for miles.

I swallow my pace and sink into a slow jog. I realize sweat is pouring from my whole body, soaking every inch of my skin and tank top. I pull my shirt up, exposing my stomach, to wipe my face. A light breeze murmurs past the winding canal, offering some relief. My hair falls forward on my red face but I don't bother pushing it aside. My hands on my waist, I let my legs slip into a walk.

Back in the Ocean Room, the dark room and blue lights cast a deep shadow on our faces. The toddler's face is blue, Keenan's face is blue, we are all deep blue. I come up for air after my reverie. There are ripples of similarity, moving through a path with purpose, physical tenacity urging me forward, a world of images along the way. And yet now I am in an ocean on the other side of the world, leading, chasing, cajoling, panicking. With the people I love in a world grander than I can fathom, but still taut with discontent.

The baby's cry stops but his face isn't happy. He's got a look of resigned angst. My whole body stresses. *He's so patient he's such a good baby I'm so tired I need to nurse*, I think. Looking around in desperation,



I veer off into the darkest edge of the vast ocean room. I finagle the baby carrier, digging through straps and buckles, arching my back, smooshing the baby to the side, while I unbutton my oxford shirt and try nursing him from within the carrier — something I've never tried before.

It doesn't work. I guess it matters how high or low your breasts are and how big or small the baby is and whether you don't have night-blindness in the deep blue Ocean Room. A Japanese family brushes past, speaking in tongues. I've seen my sister-in-law twist just so for apropos sneaky nursing with her carrier, but no. The baby rages when his latch breaks and milk runs down my stomach. I look up and wonder, how does a whale nurse?

I imagine she never stops. Somewhere near the blue surface, her baby rides her underbelly to suckle. Does she know she's the largest mammal? Does she purposefully slow her stroke against the pressure of great water to ease her baby's latch? Does she blister or bleed, cry or flinch? Does she feel hindered by a still-giant baby strapped to her chest? Does she remember when she swam with freedom and speed?

The baby's wail pierces my thoughts, and everyone else's in the Ocean Room. My twelve pound baby has overstayed the hospitality of this gracious whale. It's time to go.

Deflated yet very much engorged, we pioneer with our stroller to the elevator and now we're chasing Silas; he is running for the gems. I hate that room. It looks like a dim, carpeted kiva from the 70s and precious stones bore me. Sparkling rocks lined up in cases, smudgy glass tainting their sparkle. But Silas loves the rise and fall of the giant steps and running the carpeted pathways through the glass cases. This will keep him occupied while we determine our next move.

I'm surrounded by nature, and I can't even find a place to be natural.

The air cools as we enter the gem room. It is empty of tourists like it usually is. It's a good thing because the baby roars. Redder, louder, and angrier than any previous bout in the museum. I yell ahead to Keenan, reverse, and head to a neighboring room edged by unmoving space rocks. I find a hollow and drop to the floor, resting my back against a matte black meteorite.

The baby and I unravel ourselves from the hot straps and cloth of the black carrier. My back and front is dark and damp from milk and sweat. Normally shy, even prudish, I'm overwhelmed by a rushed, even brash, animal sense that

overturns my typical conservative nursing protocol. I don't take the time to unbutton my shirt or don a cover and stick the baby's face up my shirt, slightly exposing myself. Armed with *that certain look* and a searing Mama Bear frequency, I'm sure no one's eyes will linger. People walk by oblivious, turning toward glittering gems in the dimly lit kiva. I feel a flash of defiance run down my back. I dare someone to say something, anything to me about feeding my baby in public. It feels good. Protective. Fierce. The cold floor and giant room and dim lights and museum fatigue are lacerated by pulsing adrenaline and frayed nerves. I am on that run again, my hair in my face, my body strong, a rush of adrenaline as if I had just run six miles. My baby nestles in my soft stomach.

The black rock is cool as let-down releases the milk. The baby is hot and engrossed. A sigh escapes my lips and I reactively sit up, reaching for my too-far water bottle. I can't reach it. Resigned and relieved to have to hold still, I close my eyes. Serotonin floods my brain. Reality tilts, nursing on the floor of the Natural History Museum, and a pool of calm tingles my whole body. I sense people near. They can step over me.

We are a tableau. Part of the scenery.
Mother and Child: Nursing Through Space.

I look down at him. The baby's nose, his lips. The soft hair sprouting along his fuzzy hairline. He's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. And his smell. With him this close, I can't help but nuzzle his hair and take in his smell. A deep inhale floods my brain to my fingertips. It hits me. Just like the crunchy insects, the neanderthals, the giant blue whale, the buffalo: I provide life. I *am* nature. I don't sit encased behind dusty glass only to sparkle on demand for casual observers. I choose the sprint, the surge, the wind-in-your-hair moments. The moments I'm completely and utterly in my body. And by proximity, I also choose the meandering life plans, the seasons of confusion, the chaos or apathy of relationships, tripped-up faith, the inevitable let-down. The moment to moment, room to room, kingdom to kingdom exploration of life that hopefully unfolds into my miraculous evolution as both hard and soft; whole and broken; giver and a gracious receiver. Baby bound to my chest, hair flowing wild.

I hear Silas giggling, probably darting between glass cases of precious stones and hurdling down carpeted steps. One day I will be dust, but today I am living. I lean into my space rock, softly nursing.

For My Soul Delighteth in the Song of the Heart

ABBY PARCELL

Poetry finds its way into our worship in many ways: song, scripture, those Ella Wheeler Wilcox moments in Thomas Monson talks. And it's here on the pages of *Exponent II*. From the early days of the *Woman's Exponent* to this contemporary magazine, poetry has been a way to examine, to lament, and to praise — much like the psalms of the Old Testament. In this issue, we offer a selection of poems that illustrate a variety of experiences and approaches to the faith and the form. In "Autumn," Brittany Platt Gardner shows how a small moment can pull our past and future into the present. Jessica Hess Larsen's "Edges" has a structure that mimics the structure that the poem interrogates. With a familiar rhyme and meter found throughout the genre of children's literature, "Fences" belies a discomfort with simple answers that Maren Chen asks us to question. And Suzanna Ray's keen observation in "The Birds" calls us to the delight and wonder of God's creation. I hope these poems will inspire readers to seek out this form more often — even beyond these pages — and discover the pleasure, insight, and heart-expansion it can bring.

Edges JESSICA HESS LARSEN

my edges are fuzzy
blurry
undefined

I know not where I end
what I am made of
the shape I occupy

my form is unproven
untouched
unseen

I have not stretched
reached
tested

the boundaries of my being
the brink of my potential
the flavor of my preferences

I have lived in a shelter
a fold
an enclosure

that classifies
correlates
defines

that prunes
pressures
trims

in the name of protection
guidance
stewardship

to keep me from the peril
of questioning
of experiencing

to avoid the jeopardy
of experimenting
of tasting

my arms are folded
my knees are bent
my head is bowed

to keep me in
the box
the frame

that pinches
that squeezes
that suffocates

that hides me from my edges
my expansive edges
my powerful edges

I think perhaps my edges
reach past the sky
and hold the whole earth inside

The Birds SUZANNA RAY

They've come again at this same hour,
chattering like young maids at a bridal shower.
They fill me with bliss, for some strange reason.
Though I know it's too early in the season to expect
blossoms on the trees, I share gayity with these creatures
of the air who have chosen to settle here and there
upon the branches and vines in my backyard
as if to thank me for my handiwork in planting them.

Autumn

BRITTANY PLATT GARDNER

One day when you are grown
you will say tell me about when I was a little girl
and I will tell you a story

About how on a fine fall day
we went to the backyard
in the old house
I will say remember the little playhouse?
and the silk flowers?
I will say remember the picnic table?
and the swing set?
and you will say yes!
The swings were blue! The flowers were yellow!
I remember now
I remember now

I will say remember how you and your sister
held hands and skipped along through the grass
as tall as your knees
and how it tickled you as you ran through it?
I will say remember how you were always singing,
and how I always loved it?
and you will say yes!
those songs we sang were so silly!
always about love and family and fairies and princesses
I remember now
I remember now

I will say remember how the sun's rays
splashed down on us
and warmed us to our very centers?
I will say remember how we could almost drink
the crystal clear blue of the sky?

I will say remember how the leaves were dripping with green
and were so full of life?
and you will say yes!
I remember that tree!
and the empty bird feeder hanging from its branches
I remember now
I remember now

And then I will tell you something
you don't remember
I will tell you how I closed my eyes
for a moment,
let your songs wrap around me,
let the sunlight pierce my arms
my head
my heart
Thinking that if I soaked it in enough
it would never leave
I will tell you how the magic and transcendence
of that moment hurt
because it was so exquisite
I will tell you how I wanted to take every thing of that afternoon
the magic the sun the light the life
the happiness the songs
and store it up
bottle it up
put it in a corner of my heart
to be opened again only in the darkest, coldest,
loneliest day of winter
(for doesn't winter always follow fall?)

I will tell you it was a perfect afternoon
and you will say yes!
I remember now
I remember now

Fences

MAREN CHEN

They say good fences make good neighbors,
And I suppose that's true,
Though I tried to push it over
And I tried to shove right through.
But I couldn't move that fence
Nor stay there on my side,
So I climbed up to the top
And I sat there and I cried.

So here I sit upon this fence,
With friends on either side.
Sometimes I think it's nice here,
And sometimes I want to find
A better place, where I'll belong,
Where I'll be with my kind.
But though I don't fear, the way is not clear,
So I sit and bide my time.

But while I sit, I reach and stretch;
My tears have long since dried.
With eyes now clear and focused,
I set aside my pride.
I reach for those who need my help-
I hope that they will ask.
And when they ask
I hope I will be equal to the task.

My arms are not so strong, you see;
I don't know what to say
To take another's pain away,
To help them day to day.

When I look on the horizon,
There is no sun in sight.
And yet . . . And yet I wonder
When finally comes the light,
Who will see it, who will know?
Those firmly on the ground?
Or those like me, who hope for more,
Who seek what's not yet found?

And so I sit upon this fence;
I do what I can do.
And as I wait and hope and pray,
I'm learning something new:
Fence-sitting's not a passive thing,
Nor for the faint of heart.
There are quite a lot of us,
And if each will do their part,
We can, maybe, make a difference;
We can, maybe, make a start

To be the change we want to see,
To light a little spark.

So if you'll join us on this fence,
We will make room for you.
We can't promise anything,
But it will expand your view.
And then, like me, you'll say it loud:
"I'm a fence-sitter too."

Disregarding Explanations

INTERVIEW WITH **K DAWN**

INTERVIEWED BY RACHEL RUECKERT

Can you describe your path to becoming an artist?

Art has always been important to me; it saved me in college, but I never believed that I was an artist. It wasn't until my life changed unexpectedly after college that I found myself turning to art as a means to find not only myself, but my purpose.

I'm often sobered by how many artists wrestle their way to the realization that they are, in fact, artists. Can you say more about how art saved you? Was there a specific moment after college that turned you toward art and your purpose, or was it a gradual realization over time?

College consisted of me basically walking around in a sea of numbness for the first year. Until one day, I went to the art museum on campus; I went inside, lost myself in a photography exhibit, and knew that I needed to surround myself with art in order to survive. That realization was like guzzling down cool water on the hottest day of the summer. I needed art. Yet even then, I still told everyone, "Oh I can't do art, that's why I'm studying art history." I was so ignorant and arrogant. A few years after graduating from college, with my art history degree and plans to start an interior design business, I suddenly found myself recovering from a near death experience. I was faced with the task of discovering myself, and, in such a time of uncertainty, I found art to be my comfort and reassurance.

What are your inspirations? Are there any people in your life who particularly inspire your work or other artists who have influenced you?

As cliché as it may sound, honesty is one of my biggest inspirations. People or things that are unapologetic and honestly themselves are awe inspiring. As far as artists, you can't ask someone with an art history degree that question. In one way or another all artists have influenced me. I am particularly fond of Frida Kahlo and Faith Ringgold, however.

I noticed that one of your pieces is called "For Grandma" with the text "I am the hope and the dream." Can you say more about this beautiful piece?

My Grandmother, who has now passed on, was one of the most influential people in my life. During her life, we would wonder where our ancestors came from and speculate on features we may have gotten from them. Since her passing, my mother and I have gotten DNA testing done in an effort to answer those wonderings of my Grandmother and myself. My personal belief is that our ancestors are all around us, so I wanted a piece that conveyed the feeling of being encompassed by loved ones and paraphrased Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise".

I am struck by your use of words combined with the visual medium. The effect is powerful. "You're Not One of Us," "Issues," and "Bottled Thoughts"

are especially haunting and poignant. The text varies in size according to the piece (a viewer has to look closer at "Bottled Thoughts" to read the words, while the text in "Issues" cannot be missed and acts as the focal point of the piece). Can you speak to your inspiration and motivation for mixing language and visuals?

Art is a personal reflection of the artist, and to me, words are just another artistic medium. I don't particularly enjoy explaining my artwork or my thought process because my art is me — why is there an expectation that I should explain myself? Is there a societal expectation placed upon artists or women that we should explain ourselves? I also don't enjoy reading the placards in art museums, I'm there for the art, not what someone thinks I should know. So initially my usage of words within a visual medium was an effort to not explain myself, but then the words became art in and of themselves, the words are me. Combining the two mediums has become my ultimate symbol of vulnerability: here I am on a canvas (or board) take me or leave me, and I do NOT owe you an explanation.

Well said. Your work is also dimensional with gorgeous textures and 3D features that bulge from the canvas. What materials do you use? What draws you to those materials? Feel free to share any insights on your process.

I use whatever materials will give me the feeling for which I am searching. It may sound odd, but I find that before a piece comes



I WILL NOT
CARRY YOUR
ISSUES



to life it has a feeling (grainy, soft, undulating, etc.) and those are the materials that I search for. I use paper quite often because it is malleable and I can shape it how I desire. Most of my pieces also have an element of metallic leaf or metallic paint on them as I find that this material conveys a range of feelings that I seek to portray.

The unique textures, colors, and metallic elements of your pieces are certainly striking and memorable. I'm also curious to hear your thoughts on what the Latter-day Saint community can do to better support artists of color.

My personal experience within the Latter-day Saint community is that

there are two groups of people: those who want to support and promote artists because of their talent and those that invite artists of color to sit at their table for their own personal cause(s). I truly appreciate the people who fall in the first group because being an artist is hard! We need all the help we can get! As for the second group — stop inviting us to sit at your table. Why don't you pull up a chair at the table we've built? (Also, we're not magical colored folk who will get you a stamp on your diversity card.)

Thanks for naming this important distinction. Are there any groups, forums, websites, communities, organizations,

publications, etc. you would recommend to folks interested in seeking out and learning more about the metaphorical tables artists of color have built?

I personally think, and maybe people will disagree, that the best way to do this is to push yourself outside of your comfort zone and pay attention — not join forums or groups. Do the research, find artists of color, see who they're following, see who their inspirations are, and then keep going. It's a bit like the story *Hidden Figures*. After the movie came out, I overheard some older women in the grocery store line say, "Oh this was so good! Can you believe that we've never heard

of them?!" The ladies of *Hidden Figures* didn't appear because of a movie; their stories were always out there, but people didn't want to do the research to discover their stories. Artists of color, and particularly LDS artists of color, are here, our stories are out there, you just have to be willing to look, listen, pay attention, and push yourself out of the comfort zone of what has traditionally made up Latter-day Saint art.

What power do you think art can have on shaping and challenging the problematic parts of church culture?

Art has the power to challenge perception, to cause one to examine their relationship with the world

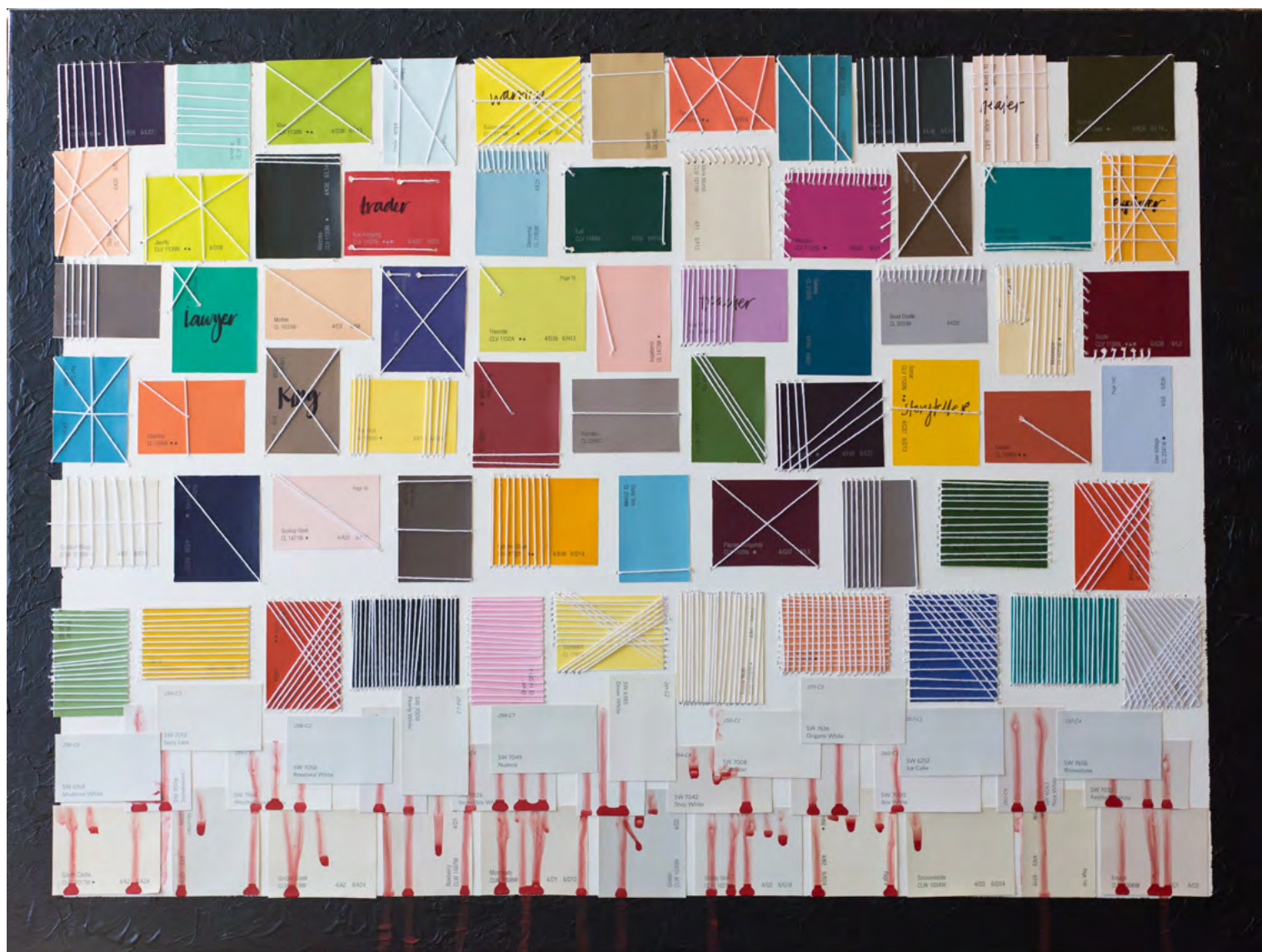
around them and their place in the world. When I make art, I don't make it with an ulterior motive, my art is based on my perceptions and my personal experiences. If we regarded art as the pieces of others that they are, instead of as tools of propaganda, I think we might be filled with more empathy and acceptance for each other.

What projects are you currently working on or hope to do in the future?

I currently am working on a series entitled "Caught," which deals with being trapped between life and death. Additionally, I am also working on a few watercolors that I hope to sell locally.

Those sound great! What are the best ways people can follow your career and support your work?

Thanks for asking! I abhor social media, but my friend runs an Instagram page for me @kdawnartproductions. I also have a website, www.kdawncreates.com, to which I post infrequently.



Erring on the Side of Love

MELANIE MCKAY

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

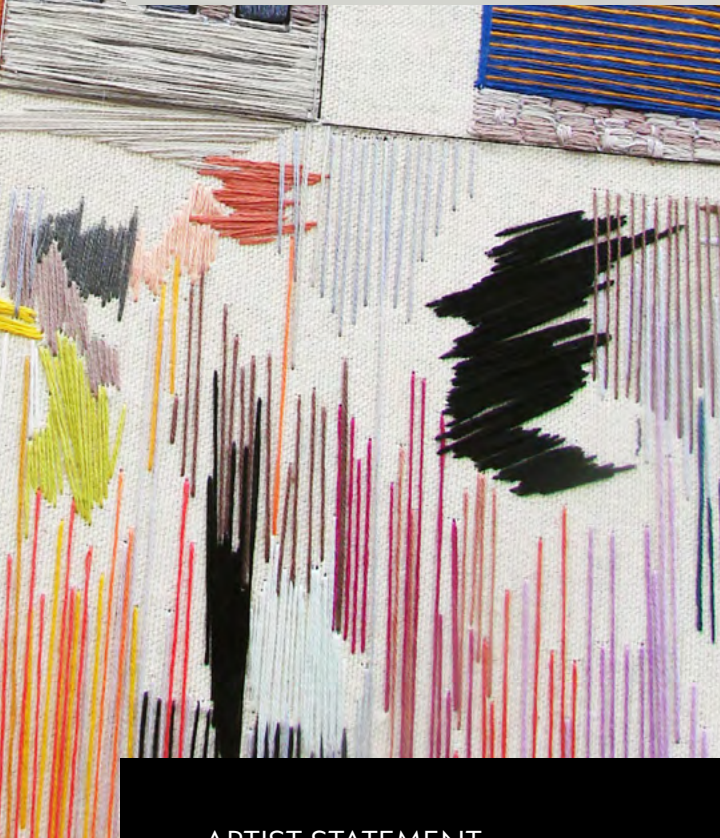
— HEBREWS 12:12-13

I hear stories from those who have received Church assistance and those who have worked at bishops' storehouses, and I am amazed. I hear about steaks being ground into hamburger because members complained that those receiving church assistance shouldn't get steak. I hear about elaborate rules about who can and cannot receive help. I hear about members in need being made to "earn" their food orders by working at the storehouse. I hear about Relief Society presidents determining which items a family truly "needs" in an attempt to ensure that no one has anything beyond their most basic necessities. I worry that while our parsimoniousness saves the Church money, we sometimes fail to nourish the spirits of those burdened with temporal needs. Fortunately, my experience with the church welfare system has been different.

My ward is located far from the Wasatch Front, so no bishops' storehouse is available. Instead, members of the Relief Society presidency or ministering sisters and brothers shop at the local grocery store and submit receipts for reimbursement. As a member of the Relief Society presidency over the past year, I've helped a family



"JK Cluster" | Stephanie Kelly Clark | @artiststephaniekellyclark



experiencing a brief period of financial hardship that, by their own admission, was self-created. With this family, my ward has the opportunity to act as Christ's hands without judgment as we seek to deliver relief from their current situation.

We also regularly help a single mother who is suffering the effects of generational poverty and the trauma and mental illness that often follow. Because I am her ministering sister whom she trusts, I am often in a position to deliver items her family needs. When she requests help, I do not conduct an assessment of whether the need is genuine. I have not worried about whether the ward would reimburse the expenses; it always does. This mother is disabled and will never be self-sufficient. And that doesn't bother me, the Relief Society president, or the bishop. If we can help this family live with a little more dignity, as well as possibly help her children avoid trauma and have a degree more hope in their lives, then we have accomplished our mission as disciples of Christ.

ARTIST STATEMENT

I consider myself a painter and I paint with thread. The process of transforming string into art struck me as something visually stimulating with complex simplicity. Engaging both traditional and innovative techniques in employing formal qualities with density, texture and pattern. The embroidery floss is my palette and the needle is my paintbrush.

A few months ago, quickly melting snow caused flooding in the apartment of a family in our ward. While the landlord scrambled to address the flooding, this family stayed

in a hotel that they couldn't afford. Because the landlord refused to pay for the hotel, the bishop offered the ward's assistance. I talked with the mother of the family about their situation. She was extremely hesitant to accept fast offerings. A fiercely independent person, she felt that her family was not desperate enough to merit this support. When she told me how stressful the situation had been and continued to be, I wondered what else would need to happen for her to feel justified in getting assistance. She did not need the additional stress of feeling unworthy of help.

After listening to her, I offered to arrange childcare to give her and her husband time to pack belongings that remained in the flooded apartment and tried to assuage her guilt about accepting the ward's assistance. I reminded her that if the situation were reversed, she would want me to get help. I told her that I pay fast offerings so that my friends and neighbors can have support when they need it. I wanted her family to resolve their challenging situation, knowing that the ward would provide a safety net and not let them freefall after this disaster. Fortunately, the landlord eventually paid for the hotel costs, but the peace of mind of knowing the bishop and ward were supportive lightened the burden of a very stressful situation.

I was recently involved in assisting a fourth family in my ward. I know the wife through a calling that gave us the opportunity to work together. The husband had some legal trouble that had caused a major crisis for the family and incurred considerable legal fees. Because I was in the Relief Society presidency, a mutual friend tipped me off that she had periodically been delivering extra groceries to them and thought additional food might be needed. Following Sacrament Meeting the following day, I sought out the mom and asked about the court case and how things were going. I also asked about their food needs. She told me she thought they were doing all right but admitted to having about \$5 left to cover the last three weeks of the month. I asked whether she would agree to let the ward buy them some groceries. Believing that they were responsible for the situation they were in, she didn't feel comfortable accepting my offer. I explained that it didn't matter how they got into this position; we wanted to help. She was in tears from the stress of trying to make their budget stretch to fulfill their needs. The ward could not fix the legal or ensuing employment challenges, but at least we could help feed her family.

Because she was too emotional to describe the situation, I laid out the basics of the depleted grocery budget to our bishop. He was already aware of the larger situation and did not make any inquiries about how much food the family

already had or what other resources they had exhausted. He simply shared a brief anecdote about having received food from the bishops' storehouse himself as a child. He assured her that the Church has plenty of money and that her situation would be temporary. We asked whether she wanted to submit receipts for food she purchased herself or have me take her shopping. She chose the latter, so she and I ditched Sunday School and Relief Society and went to Costco.

On our way, we had a comfortable, friendly conversation. Because her children were not with us, she was candid about how her situation was affecting her. Once at Costco, I pointed out items that might help relieve her stress, such as a birthday cake for her daughter, who would be two the next day, some prepared meals for nights when she was working, easy snacks for the kids, and a treat for herself because it was clear from our conversation that she had not done anything for herself in awhile. Maybe this was too overbearing of me, but she seemed to have drunk the self-reliance Kool-Aid so long that she was hesitant to purchase anything she did not absolutely need. With my encouragement, she conceded to purchase a few "luxury" items beyond basic necessities. While we loaded up a second cart with various sized diapers for her children, we shared stories about the woes of potty training. Checking out felt like any other shopping experience with a friend, but it happened to be my card we ran at checkout. And then we pushed the two carts full of items to the parking lot and headed back to retrieve our families from church.

Because we both work and have several children, that was our only shopping trip together. That friendly, non-judgmental trip laid the groundwork for the ward to continue helping this family, however. It provided a foundation for the mom to shop online, have me pay online, and then have the groceries delivered to her doorstep, which was a huge time-saver for both of us.

Working with people to fill their needs feels like Christ's work. So often I think we look at those in need with an eye toward giving only what is absolutely necessary. Though I see the value in being careful with Church funds, I see more value in being careful with Church members who may break with the strain of temporary or enduring poverty. If we strive to fulfill their needs by standing shoulder to shoulder with them and helping them as we would want to be helped, we can truly do the Lord's work.

Gods in Boxes

BRITTNEY HARTLEY

I was raised with only whispers of the concept of a Heavenly Mother. I don't remember Her at all in the construct of Mormonism I had experienced as a youth or even as a young adult. Then, like many Mormon feminists, I discovered that these whispers had more substance to them. I wept uncontrollably when I read *Mother's Milk* where Rachel Steenblik replaced pronouns in Biblical verses from "He" to "She." It filled a hole I never thought I had. I was encouraged when the Gospel Topics Essays devoted time to Her. When David Paulsen and Martin Pulido published their "A Mother There" historical survey, I drank the words as if they were water to my parched throat. I felt Her power when I studied early Mormon History where women could bless and anoint other women as they prepared for childbirth. While in Rome, I was so touched by the ever-constant presence of Mary, who takes over some of the need for a feminine God in Catholicism. In her, I saw a human ache for a mother. I dove into accounts of Asherah and references in the Bible that speak of a Feminine Divine. One of my favorite things about being a Mormon was learning about Her.

Over time, I began to have experiences with deity that had a female presence to them. As I sought Her, I would find Her in songs that had always touched me or in moments when I held crying children late at night. One Sunday,

after I had been praying for a few weeks to come to know Her better, we had a lesson where the humanitarian leader spoke of all the work they had been doing to help those most marginalized in our community. After weeks of seeking Her, I felt Her scream at me as loud as the sun is bright: "if you want to find me, I'm here, with my children who are suffering." I clung to these experiences.





mother hen, nursing mother, mother in labor, or mother bear. A sense of completion came as I developed this feminine side of God.

Then, like what happens so often in life, this sense of safety in “arriving” at the fullness of God was blown apart again. During a walking meditation, I had an out of body experience where I felt as if I was in the midst of God. It felt expansive, as if I was inside every element of the universe. I looked down and saw the earth. Each religion had its own color and flavor as they reached toward God and the mysterious beyond. In this expanse, I didn’t feel any gender or embodiment at all. I didn’t feel white or black, male or female, gay or straight, monogamous or polygamous. It was a permeating force of interconnectedness that tended all creation toward good and love. I felt God’s presence in every box we had put God in, like air inside every church ever constructed. When I came home I felt bewildered, even confused. After this experience

As a seminary teacher and gospel doctrine teacher, I began to speak more openly about my testimony of Her. I bore my testimony of Her in Church. Women found me and began to share their experiences of Her with me. My home reflected my beliefs in Her, as I filled it with images of both male and female depictions of God. I started to pray to Heavenly Parents. I taught about Her in Seminary whenever we came across scriptures that spoke of God as a

I never felt Heavenly Mother or Heavenly Father as an embodied being again.

Belief in God for me has been a series of boxes, like a Russian nesting doll in reverse. At first, my concept of God was all male. He was white, perfect, embodied, heterosexual, unchanging, demanding, and even a little scary. Then life began to challenge that particular box, and I moved toward a

male God who was loving, with passion, and finite. When I became a mother, this concept was filled out with His female companion: a Mother in Heaven. God felt more complete with Her standing at His side. Then, even that box began to feel restrictive. With this Anglo male-female couple there were still so many people who were not represented with this God. What about my intersex friends, transgender friends, gay friends, disabled friends, non-binary friends, black friends, or polyamorous friends? Where were they in this patriarchal male/silent female God? And the box broke open again, wider, like how a crab is continually growing out of its shell.

It was then that I fell in love with the concept of God as community. God as community, ideally, could hold all of us. I imagined God like a Christmas dinner where an ideal family could hold each individual person and still be one family. Early Mormon concepts of Zion fueled my belief in God at this stage. I felt God in these moments of interconnectedness. I felt more like God when I could hold the experiences of so many others in my mind and heart. It felt wonderful and expansive enough to fit every person on earth inside my worldview. Then, like the boxes before, it eventually became too small. The communal God still had limitations. It began to feel like a room full of people who loved me, but the room was in a building across the street. In meditations I began to truly face the idea of mortality, and that perhaps I was merely creating the heaven that I so deeply craved: a place where my friends and family could be in one room laughing together. This was just another box that I wanted to be true, so I willed it into existence with my mind. With another painful deconstruction, I let go of all my preconceived notions and wishes for what I wanted God and heaven to be and embraced this imperfect, mortal, beautiful life in front of me.

Now, it feels like God is boxless. I don't need to define it, be a missionary for it, study deep philosophical books to find it, debate what form it takes, or exclude people who experience God differently. All I have to do to experience God is stop and see. I don't have to seek a male or female God's presence. God is in a garden. God is in my children, whichever gender they decide to present as. God is my dog when she lays her head on my lap. God is in my meditation group, in my Mormon ward, in Cathedrals in Rome, in temples in Thailand, and in all the sacred spaces humans create. God is at the top of the mountain when I reach the summit of a hike, but also halfway up, and at the bottom. I no longer seek for life after death,

On Seeking Closeness with the Feminine Divine¹

NAIN CHRISTOPHERSON

I find myself searching
for someone heavenly among my mothers

in earthly mothers searching
for what is heavenly

in heaven searching for what
looks more like me like
a mother like mine yearning
for an image in what we call
divine a quest for my own
paradigm between my own lines

we have *Elohim*
know that it's plural
moon about in groves and sense
iniquity in what we must not call reform
rather erasure

ask how is it God
that Thou hast left us at the mercy
of some male deuteronomist's understanding
some mistranslation

ask what is it I am worth
to you ask should it matter

ask will we be invisible forever

and where is the wisdom the healing
of the nations we were taught once She brings

[break]

for now nothing
to do but seek her out in spaces
where to look if not the margins of
these pages the pauses
between meditative breaths
the shadows cast by trees
of life the whites
of the reflections of my eyes
which I'm told contain every color

1. In the Ancient Near Eastern tradition, Asherah, God's wife, was commonly worshiped as the Mother Goddess and represented by a tree. Her name and mentions of the wooden poles crafted in her honor (which were often idolized) were removed from the Old Testament and replaced with the word "grove" or "groves" around 640 BC

for heaven, or for God to be a certain way. Life, love, and God are no longer about story, but about connection.

In connection, I am fully and forever alive in this web of creation that is so much bigger than me. I no longer worry about immortality or my place in it, because I am a thread in the tapestry that holds the past and the future together. My choices, my friends, my family, my children, will carry echoes of me long after I die. The only thing we have to decide is what those echoes will say, what they add to the chorus of souls who have gone on before. I no longer look “lo here, lo there” for heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven is within me and in the midst of me, as referenced in Luke 17. All I need do is open my eyes to see. There was heaven all around me just waiting for me to develop eyes to see it. Some Sundays, I’ll find it in a moment when we gather together as women in Relief Society and show one another grace and inspiration.

Or I’ll find heaven in a hallway at church with other mothers with young children as we talk openly about our struggles and bear one another’s burdens for a moment. And some Sundays, the heaven presented there seems so small, suffocating, and limiting that the only thing I can do is walk out in a silent declaration that God and heaven encompass more than this little clubhouse. I never know which Sunday it will be, but I always try to be open to however God might show up that day.

So what now of my Mormon community? Do I throw away the Heavenly Mother that I’ve grown to love? Absolutely not. The mythology of the gendered, feminine divine was a house where I was allowed to grow and where my femininity was cultivated. That mother still raised me and ignited the divine within myself. Her presence feels like home. When

I hear whispers of Her at Church, it feels like my mom’s red beef enchiladas. Maybe they aren’t the best 5-star enchiladas in the world, but they soothe my soul. No matter how many enchiladas I try, there’s something about your own family recipes. In that way, Mormonism and Heavenly Mother will always be my home. It did what all spiritual homes are meant to do, it gave me roots to grow and then wings to fly. Religions are springboards into conversations about humanity and experiences with the Divine. In my wanderings and my seeking toward God in my own unique way, I feel an approving nod from Brother Joseph, and an embracing hug from Sister Emma. Like Joseph, I speak of my experiences with God reverently but also with courage, regardless of the institutional consequences.

Today, the story of our Heavenly Mother is so needed in our patriarchal temple ceremony, in our wards, in our art, in our music, and in our manuals. But She is needed only because we decided to make God an embodied male, and for Mormons, that belief is a hill we will die on. When I speak of Her in church, I do so as a way to complete this particular box we place God in. I do it because we as a community do not see women as divine in the same way we see men as divine. I do it because women have their own power, however you want to define it, to call down powers of heaven, and Heavenly Mother may be our only doctrinal access to that power. I cherish my Heavenly Mother for all She did to raise me, but even She, in the end, was not big enough to hold the fullness of God.

ARTIST STATEMENT

In attempting to describe sublime experiences in words, one feels inadequate or pretentious. Perhaps this is why landscape painters have taken on depicting the sublime. Claire Taylor follows this tradition by visually expressing her ineffable encounters and conversations with what humans refer to as “the natural world” — a named distinction for wildlife and landscapes as if we are separate from them. By sharing her experiences, Taylor challenges the construct of the nature/culture divide.

These two paintings were part of Claire Taylor’s exhibit, “Transcendence by Observation,” which showed at the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art in the spring of 2019.

The Tongue of Angels

CORI SMITH ELZEY

"...[A]fter ye had received the Holy Ghost ye could speak with the tongue of angels..."

— 2 NEPHI 32:2–3

"...[A]fter ye had received the Holy Ghost ye could speak with the tongue of angels..."

I live in Shenzhen, China.

I did not anticipate moving to China when I got married two years ago. Three years ago, I was a Mid-Single member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I competed with my sister for "Favorite Aunt" status, advanced my career, and hung out with my friends. Now I am a functional illiterate in a new country.

I love this new adventure in China, but I am very much an outsider because I do not speak or read Mandarin. I can identify about six written characters — not enough to sound out store names and take an educated guess about what I will find inside. Even as a new missionary in Portugal, I learned to find cold medicine at the "farmacia" and money at the "banco." In China, "药店" and "银行" are non-starters.

I can hear and speak more words than I can recognize in written form, but not enough for context. And the spoken tones are tricky! For my entire life, I have used

of the word; change the modulation, and you change the word. If I'm not careful, my emotions will cause me to say something incomprehensible or crazy.

A whole universe of excitement, fun, and intrigue swirls around me in China, and I do not have the linguistic ability to understand or participate. Similarly, an eternity of spiritual insight is currently out of reach because I do not speak the language of the Spirit fluently either.

How do I bridge these gaps?

First, I need to realize the value of learning new languages, whether it is Mandarin or the language of the Spirit.

I have met people (sometimes in my own mirror who assume that because the Spirit is not speaking a language they understand, God must not have anything useful to say. Maybe, they assume, God does not love them, or is out-of-touch.

This is akin to me assuming that my 1.4 billion new friends are all ignorant, simply because I do not understand what they are saying. This may sound silly, but how often do we assume that someone is stupid because he or she is not eloquent in the language we speak?

I am surrounded by people who speak broken English. These are highly professional, intelligent, talented people who have useful things to say. They are often embarrassed that they do not speak better English, which in turn, humbles me. I am in *their* country, after all.

Speaking the language of the Spirit is equally humbling. It requires humility to accept that the Lord might have a different opinion than I, or might know something I do not. It is all well and good to stand up in testimony meeting and say "I know the Lord has a plan for me," but when the

ARTIST STATEMENT

I paint people. My work uses an obscure narrative to pull the viewer into a story and into a relationship with the painting subject. Recently I have been experimenting with the human gaze. My subjects are looking for something, responding to a sound, seeing something for the first time or having spiritual awakenings-sometimes all at the same time.

the tone of my voice to express emotion: rising tones indicate a question, stretched tones indicate sarcasm, and so forth. In Mandarin, tonal modulations are part



"Amanda and Zoe (Their Eyes)" | Amanda Demos Larsen

rubber meets the road, do I really believe it? What happens when that plan does not take me where I think I should go?

Do I still trust the speaker's intelligence even when I do not fully understand the message?

Second, I need to listen carefully to the native speakers, or at least people with considerably more experience speaking Mandarin or communicating with the Lord.

What sounds do Mandarin speakers make?
Are there nasal inflections? Sibilants? Does the word have a rising or falling tone?

The first Mandarin word I understood in context was "Mine?" The girl in front of me had dropped money on the floor. I tapped her arm and pointed. She said 我的, which is translated in Pinyin as "wǒde" Mine? I nodded. I was on cloud nine for the rest of the day. I had heard and understood a single word.

I listen intently to conversations in Mandarin. It is exciting to pick out words from the gibberish. "... Our..... their..... this one... big.... new one.... 27....that's correct..." It's fun. It is slowly becoming easier to hear the different tones.

Native Speaker: "Do you hear the difference? Hǎo (好) means good. Hào (号) means number."

Me: "Please repeat that."

As Elijah learned on Mount Horeb, the Lord speaks in a still, small voice. Even though He could, the Lord usually doesn't speak to us through wind, earthquakes, fire, or other noisy means. I think the very stillness of His voice shows his respect for our agency. He is not going to overwhelm us with a thundering "FOLLOW ME." Instead, he will call in "a still voice of perfect mildness"¹ and hope that we choose to hear.

Hearing takes concentration and desire. It is hard work. The Nephites had to "open their ears to hear"² the Lord's voice. The Nephites' circumstances had probably humbled them — I would certainly be shaken up by three days of darkness, earthquakes, and post-crucifixion chaos — and they had gathered at the temple. Yet they still had to perform the extra work to open their ears.

I have no right to demand my Chinese neighbors speak English; if I truly want to understand them, I must learn their language. Similarly, if I do not slow down, pay attention, and open my ears to the Spirit, I might miss something good.

The third step is to imitate native speakers.

On my mission, I learned that there were Portuguese sounds that my American English trained mouth simply could not make. I remember practicing "-lhe" and "-lho" while the youth in Rio Maior giggled. They told me to put the sides of my tongue on my top teeth, and the tip of my tongue down, and to hold my throat just so.

I never mastered that sound.

I ask my new Chinese friends many strange questions. "How do you make that sound?" "Where do you put your tongue?" "Is your mouth more open or more closed?" "Is this the first tone or the third tone?" "Is the 'jiā' in 'dàjiāhǎo' the same 'jiā' that means 'family'?"

Native Speaker: "Měiguórén"

Me: "Maaaaayyeeegwoollhen" and
"..llrrren" and "....rrrrhen"

Me: "Please say that again."

We laugh a lot. Often, my Chinese friends have not thought about how, physically, they make each sound. They just do it, and have done it since they were tiny. I have seen animated side discussions before they come to a consensus and tell me what to do. And then, I do my best to obey.

If I want to speak Mandarin well, then I must imitate my teachers and follow their instructions. It makes no sense for me to tell my Chinese friends, "No... I want to pronounce 好 (hǎo) as 号 (hào)." They are two different words. If I choose to ignore my teachers, I will have a hard time being understood.

If my goal is to speak the language of the Spirit well, I need to imitate the Lord and his prophets, and I need to follow the "rules" of this new language.

This type of following or obedience is not, by any means, blind or unquestioning obedience. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are often criticized for following our leaders blindly, without thought or question. Obedience has become a naughty word to one cultural faction, while questioning has become anathema to the other. Yet the Lord has invited us to question and seek knowledge as we obey. "Prove me now herewith"³ He says. "Try obedience, and see if it works. Test me." And I do. I believe our Heavenly Father wants intentional obedience.

During nearly every General Conference I glance at the TV screen and say to one or more of the speakers, “You want what?” and the proving process begins anew. I pray, I research, I remember other times where I was blessed for following a prophet’s counsel and my toe stretches toward the obedience pool. If no alligators bite my toe off, I insert my whole foot, and so on. The Lord usually sends me a comforting feeling affirming “this will work out,” long before I have a full understanding of any particular issue. As I obey, I learn more, I see the blessings, and obedience becomes a little easier.

Abraham was already a good person, but he wanted more. More knowledge, happiness, more commandments, more opportunities to obey and receive blessings. He also said, “There is a law ... upon which all blessings are predicated — and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.”⁴ I see this language as a binding contract, except that my counterpart (the Lord) is perfect and can never breach. If I want Blessing X, I must obey the law attached to that blessing. I cannot simply tell the Lord, “No... I’m going to say 好 (hǎo) instead of 号 (hào), and you will give me the blessing anyway.”

This ties in with the last step in learning a new language, which is to practice, practice, practice.

I do not know whether it will take me 10,000 hours to become an expert in either Mandarin or the language of the Spirit. I do know that I have not given enough time to either.

I think this is why the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is, well, old.⁵ They have had a long time to practice hearing the Spirit, following promptings, asking questions, and receiving answers. Fortunately, the Lord is willing to work with me as I am today, and will help me grow and progress for as long as I want.

The Church has a hopeful future in China, and I am excited to watch the next few years unfold. Gospel seeds have been growing slowly here for a long time.

President Nelson was prompted to learn Mandarin after hearing President Kimball speak about the Chinese people in 1979.⁶ His professional encounters with Chinese nationals grew into friendships, opportunities to train Chinese heart surgeons, and later a special assignment to save a famous opera singer’s life. President Nelson was recently named an Old Friend of China.⁷

Elder Gerrit Gong is ethnically Chinese, and has a history of professional interactions with China.

There are Chinese members here in China. Most of them encountered the Church and were baptized abroad. While no formal or informal proselytizing is allowed here, Chinese nationals are allowed to teach the gospel to their family members. Any prospective converts must leave the country to be baptized.

The law also requires Chinese saints and foreign saints to worship separately. We have a Chinese branch in Shenzhen, but I know nothing about them. I don’t even think my branch president or district president know anything; the organizations are completely separate.

It is strange to know that there are mystery members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in my city. Is the nice bakery lady LDS? What about that cute family over there? I can’t ask. How will the Lord bring all these pieces together? I don’t know! I wonder if, when the restrictions are removed, we will find whole communities who have been effectively LDS for years.

Jim and I live in Shenzhen, China. We are in the center of conversations, history, culture, and possibilities we do not understand. I need to work on my Mandarin and Spiritual linguistic skills because great things are afoot and I do not want to miss them.

NOTES

1. Helaman 5:30.
2. 3 Nephi 11:5
3. Malachi 3:10
4. D&C 130:20-21
5. There were some exceptions in the early years. Joseph Smith was young, but he had an unusually intensive training regime.
6. Walch, Tad, President Nelson Honored as “Old Friend” by Chinese Doctors He Trained, Church News, 11/3/2015. available <https://www.lds.org/church/news/president-nelson-honored-as-old-friend-by-chinese-doctors-he-trained?lang=eng> and Walch, Tad, President Nelson warmly welcomed as ‘Old Friend of China’ for pioneering open-heart surgery there, Deseret News, 11/29/2015. available <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/865640175/President-Nelson-warmly-welcomed-as-Old-Friend-of-China-for-pioneering-open-heart-surgery-there.html>
7. Id.



Stalking My Own Pioneer

ELLEN FAGG WEIST

When I was young, my family spent hours on Sunday afternoons paging through my father's book of remembrance, looking at grainy photographs and hearing stories about our ancestors.

My mother, Jean, was an amateur genealogist — as a child I thought if you were named Jean it was a requirement that you studied genealogy — and she wanted us to be proud of our heritage.

You're descended from Oregon Trail pioneers on my side, she'd say, and from Mormon Trail stock on your father's side.

Between learning Oregon history at school and Mormon church history in Primary, I got all the names and dates mixed up. I imagined my mother's Blackburns and Huckins, along with my father's Faggs and Prices and Waltons, in a wagon company with Moses and the Lost Tribes of Israel, everyone searching for buffalo chips while Brigham Young forded the Platte River on horseback.

But one story about Elizabeth, my great-great grandmother on my father's side, stood out. Actually, it wasn't even a story exactly, more of an image: Elizabeth, in her late

20s, standing on a dock and throwing her wedding ring into the ocean, while her young daughters watched.

At age 8 or 9, I didn't know any more details, but that image intrigued me. Maybe it was because I didn't know anyone then who had been divorced. Maybe I was caught off guard by the idea of throwing away jewelry, because I prized the only real ring I owned. It was a pink birthstone ring I won for reading the most books in the second grade, and I loved wearing it, even though the ring was so cheap it left a green mark on my finger. I loved trying on my mother's wedding ring during long church meetings, imagining that I would grow up someday and have a ring and a husband and children of my own.

But a ring and a husband and children didn't come to me. Not easily. Not naturally. Not until now. After graduating from college, I moved to Salt Lake City, and spent my 20s in the dusty desert of living singly in a very married state. I felt restless, which propelled me toward an endless slate of parties, concerts, and weekend road trips. I remember meeting men who always seemed

to be looking over their shoulder for someone else to talk to, and house parties where I was grateful to slip away without revealing anything personal about myself. I remember entanglements with men that made me feel like the intellectual girlfriend, the second wife.

By my 30s, while most of my friends were either married or getting married, I had collected a handful of serious boyfriends but never reached the ring stage. Maybe I wasn't the type, I thought. Maybe I was meant to be alone. Maybe I talked too much, maybe I was too strong-willed, too independent, too much of a feminist. Maybe I just didn't need a man enough.

My great-great grandmother Elizabeth, by contrast, married three times; three times, that is, to my none. First she fell in love with John Fagg, my relative. My family believes he died young in a railroad accident; others claim he disappeared. Whatever happened, Elizabeth was pregnant and alone at age 19, delivering her son, my great grandfather, John Birch Fagg, in the poorhouse. Next, she married a handsome policeman nicknamed the Flower of Kent, with whom she had two daughters, the entire family later joining the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She was in her late 20s when they split up, an event marked by that dramatic tossing of the ring into the sea.

About a decade later, at age 38, she launched a 5,000-mile journey from Dover, England, to Zion, walking down Emigration Canyon into the Salt Lake Valley on September 15, 1868. Three months later, she married Joseph Harker, a marriage that stuck. He was a sheep rancher and "over Jordan" settler who already had two wives.

What I knew about Elizabeth didn't fit very neatly into my stereotypes of frontier-era women. There was that divorce, for one thing, and then her decision to throw away her wedding ring, the most valuable thing the family owned. In Utah, when she'd barely settled into a new life with a new husband, she was gutsy enough to announce that she didn't want to live with the other wives. Which is why, in 1872, her husband installed Elizabeth on his Rush Valley sheep ranch.

Cautioned about the danger of living alone, Elizabeth claimed she wasn't scared. Armed with a jar of fruit and an umbrella, she said she could take care of herself. Living in the west desert, she worked as a rural midwife and befriended Native Americans. They, in turn, called her a "heap brave squaw," according to the stories her granddaughters handed down.

"The tradition of the pioneer that is strong all through the West is a cult in Utah," Wallace Stegner wrote in *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail*. In some ways, Elizabeth didn't seem like she was part of the Cult of The Utah Pioneer: she wasn't one of the famous ones, Mormon royalty, who crossed the plains with the original companies of settlers, or one of the authentic martyrs who died along the way.

In fact, Elizabeth barely qualified in the record books. After sending two of her children to America first, Elizabeth didn't arrive until 1868, the last year before the intercontinental railroad was completed. I like to joke that she was one of the few pioneer women who hadn't married Brigham Young. When I started piecing the facts together, I started thinking of my family as outsiders, upstarts perhaps, who had arrived late to the party and didn't have much of a claim.

ARTIST STATEMENT

In May 2006, Cindy Bean went to visit her grandparents in the small German town of Hermuthausen. In their sitting room, they had a few traditional Scherenschnitte on the wall. The simple beauty and intricacy of the pieces inspired Bean to create her own. Through trial and error, she developed expertise in the technique. Bean gains much of her inspiration from silence. Freeing herself from the constant bombardment of everyday tasks helps her to be more creative and opens her mind.

By the time I left Salt Lake City, I thought of the hoopla over the state's 24th of July celebrations as provincial.

At 38, when she crossed the plains, Elizabeth was a divorced single mom. At 38, I had just finished a creative writing degree, writing essays about my connection to my family's pioneer history. I liked mythologizing Elizabeth, not for the genealogical facts, but because I was fascinated by all the ways her life seemed to bleed outside the lines of cultural history. Certainly she was brave. Maybe she was difficult. At best, the stories we have of her life are shadowy and vague, retold by granddaughters from the stories passed down by their mothers. I began embroidering my own myth out of the details of Elizabeth's life, thinking of her as a ballsy proto-feminist, a character as lively as Anne of Green Gables, as quick-witted as Nancy Drew. I claimed her as my pioneer. You might even say I started stalking her.

There's meaning in the dust, the poets tell us. Turn over a handful of dirt at the place something has happened, and you're looking at history. That idea prompted me to make pilgrimages to the places where Elizabeth had lived, looking for some kind of tangible evidence of her. But all the stray facts — even the date of her death (1897, not 1899, as her gravestone states) or place (Taylorsville, Utah) or circumstances (after an operation to remove tumors) — didn't reveal much of anything about her emotional life. I laid roses on her grave at Elysian Gardens Cemetery in Murray. I drove to the West Desert to sit at the mouth of Harker Canyon, named for her last husband. I drove by the house on 4800 South in Taylorsville which he had built for her in the 1880s, a structure now remodeled so many times that it was nearly unrecognizable from frontier-era photographs. In the LDS Church archives, I searched the records of the Perpetual Emigration Fund, and learned my thrifty foremother was, apparently, a deadbeat: Elizabeth still owed the church \$68 for her passage to Zion. I even spent two weeks walking across the state of Iowa as part of a pioneer trek, hoping to see through a keyhole back into history. What I got was four layers of blisters and a lost toenail.

I was interested in her story, but mostly I was obsessed by those three marriages: the mystery surrounding the disappearance of my ancestor, the man who passed down the family name (did he die or simply abandon her?); that second marriage that ended in divorce ("I don't need a man who will hit me," Elizabeth proclaims in one family story), and finally the polygamist (why did he build Elizabeth's house with doorways so short she had to stoop to pass under them?). When I stood in front of the black-and-white photograph hanging in the Frontier Medicine room of the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Museum, I wanted to read something in her face. I wanted to learn something from her about love, about marriage. I stared at her broad forehead and ruddy cheeks, noticed how her hair was pulled back from a center part, no loose ends escaping.

Two weeks later, when I saw the envelope in my mailbox, I quickly realized what had happened. A museum volunteer had gotten confused, addressing the envelope to Elizabeth with my street number. I was surprised at how eerie it felt to be opening a letter sent to a dead woman. I pulled out her photograph, and stared into her eyes. From this distance, I couldn't tell if her eyes were blue like my father's, like mine. By now, my great-great grandmother's quiet and inscrutable expression seemed as familiar as the Mona Lisa's.

By the time I turned 45, I had racked up addresses in Oregon, Utah, Arizona, Iowa, California, and New York. I have never armed myself with canned peaches, yet in all of my years as an unmarried woman, I've drawn strength from what I consider Elizabeth's hopeful independence. And the way her life, like mine, didn't conform to cultural expectations. Now, though, that's all about to change. I'm getting married, which is why I'm here at a jewelry gallery on 9th East. As the artist arranges hand-crafted rings on a glass display case for me to try on, somehow I don't feel qualified, like I've arrived late to another party. I joke that I'll get carded, as if I'm too old to be doing this for the first time. In May, the day after Dan proposed, my new fiancé held my hand and waltzed me through three jewelry stores, while I argued for seeing a movie that night, and an eventual elopement. This was a year after we met, rather randomly, on a shuttle bus at a journalism conference in Las Vegas.

It's hard to know what to make of the dust of your lives before it's layered into history. But that first night, the night Dan and I met, we both felt something unfolding. The first time I opened my mouth, he says now, he knew he didn't want to leave my side. I tell him I have never met anyone who listened so intently to what I wasn't saying. We fell in love thanks to unlimited night and weekend cell phone minutes and in spite of all the dropped connections stretching between Utah and Ohio.

Colleagues pile wedding planning books on my desk. With 12 siblings and their spouses and kids between us, the details of planning a long-distance, cross-country, cross-religious ceremony confuses me, makes me want to take a nap. Or better yet, cry. Simple, we've agreed, let's keep this simple, we're too old to let convention rule our lives, yet all the decisions before us as two middle-ageish singletons combining our lives pile up.

Shopping for a ring? That's something I can do. When I fill out the information on the jeweler's form, I look at my own familiar block printing — *ELLEN FAGG* — and I'm struck by the meaning of taking on a new last name. It's just jewelry, I know, just a ring. There are billboards advertising diamonds all over the valley. Couples buy them every day. But this is me, this is us, and I think of Elizabeth, whose memory has taught me about the symbolic weight of a ring. Trying on an embossed engagement band, the most expensive piece of jewelry I will own, I am crossing over into another story of my own.

Creating a Meaningful Celebration of Young Womanhood

BETHANY BRADY SPALDING

As my oldest daughter, Simone, grew closer to turning twelve, I began thinking a great deal about how to celebrate this significant rite of passage from childhood into young womanhood. As usual, church didn't have a ceremony or ordinance to mark this occasion for my girl (or her other two younger sisters who would follow in the years to come). And it's so easy to lament the lack of feminine rituals in our faith tradition. But instead of getting too weighed down over the discrepancy, I tried to use the absence to our advantage and recognized it as an opening to create our very own ritual. From festive baby blessings at home in Washington DC, to baptisms on the banks of Virginia's James River with live music and a party, our family was accustomed to celebrating spiritual milestones in ways that give us the space to incorporate our personalities and beliefs. So I got busy brainstorming.

I had four main hopes for Simone as she turned twelve and became a young woman. I hoped that she would:

- Understand the joys and power of being a woman
- Discover her own strength and capacity
- Become a force for good in the world
- Feel connected to Heavenly Mother

Reflecting long and hard on how to accomplish my motherly hopes, I started to craft a multi-faceted *Entrance to Young Womanhood Celebration* for Simone. She was turning twelve right on the eve of our family departing on an eight month trip around the world as part of my husband's sabbatical from the University of Richmond. As a result of this opportunity, we would have more time, flexibility, and a few crazy opportunities around which to build her celebration. I recognize that our family situation this year has been unusual, but I share our experiences here in hopes that other parents might be inspired to create their own unique celebrations for their soon-to-be-twelve-year-old daughters.

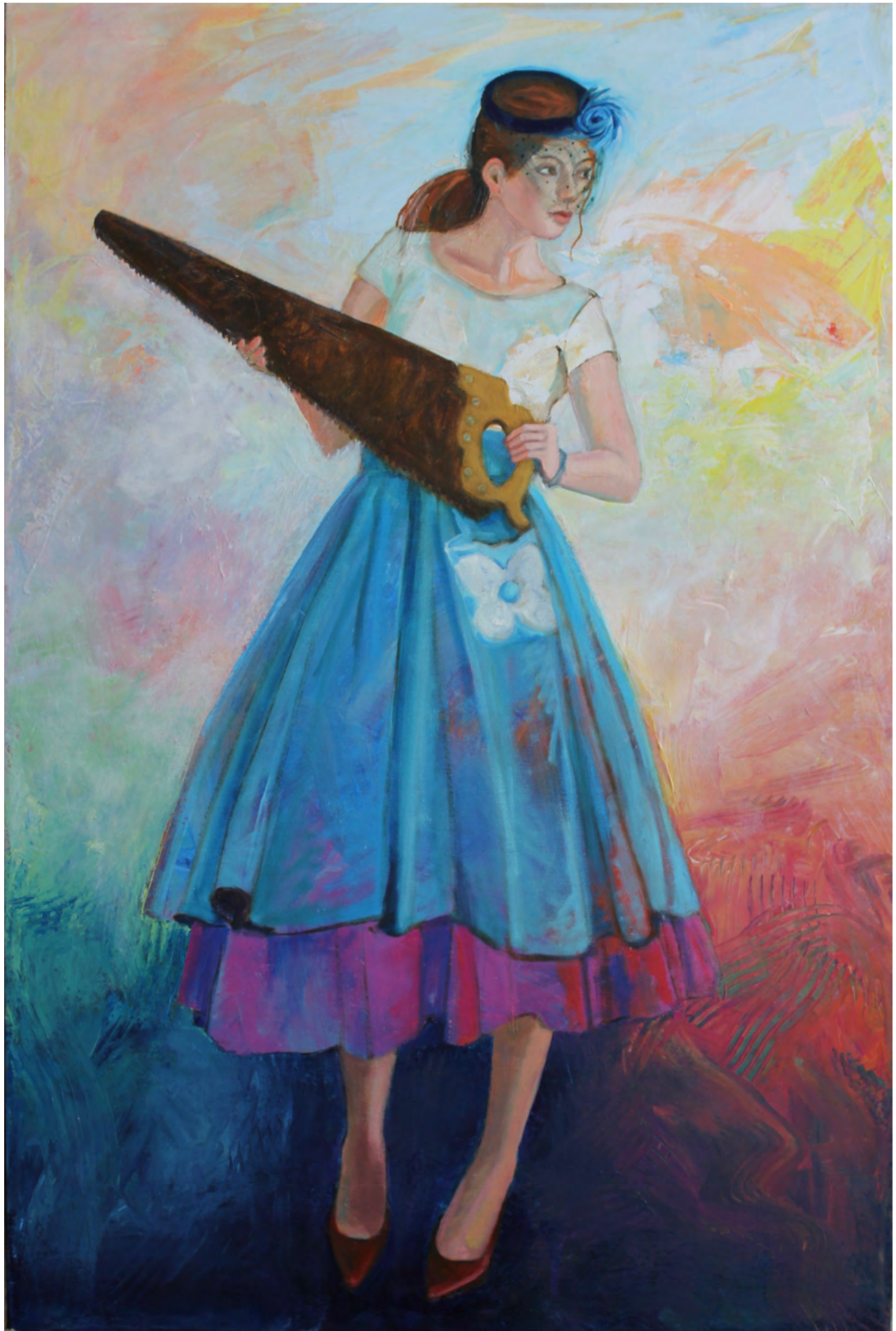
Simone's *Entrance to Youngwomanhood Celebration* had three components:

1. **COMMUNITY:** A women's wisdom circle
2. **CHALLENGE:** A womanhood walk-about
3. **CONTRIBUTION:** A way to empower other young women around the world

1. COMMUNITY: A WOMEN'S WISDOM CIRCLE

I wanted Simone to be showered with wisdom from the women I most love and respect in our community. So I invited about thirty of our closest friends to gather in our home one Sunday evening in December right after Simone's twelfth birthday. The month before, I had asked everyone to prepare words of wisdom for Simone on the joys and gifts of womanhood, as well as insights on living a meaningful life — drawing on their own faith traditions and life experiences. The women spanned a wide and beautiful array of religious backgrounds and ethnicities, and ranged in age from their 20s to their 70s. After an hour of casual chatting, we circled around Simone in our living room and began to share. I started off by introducing the importance of the age of twelve in our faith tradition, explaining our theology of Heavenly Mother (and how She is often referred to as Wisdom in the scriptures), and imparting my own wisdom with Simone on how to live a meaningful life. And then each woman took a few minutes to share her insights. The words that flowed were raw, real, deeply personal, and compelling. There were cheers, tears, wild laughter, and a sense that we had tapped into an infinite and universal female force. And Simone basked in it all.

It is difficult for me to describe the ethereal quality of the evening, but it was surely transcendent, and we all left enlightened. To capture the experience, I'm compiling each woman's words of wisdom into a



book (along with contributions from extended family and friends who live on the other side of the country and couldn't attend). It will be a guidebook for Simone's life...her own personal book of scripture.

Simone described her experience in her journal, "All of these women had been teenagers . . . and they gave me great advice that will stick with me through all the upcoming important and influential decisions I'll make in the future. Having the gathering with all these women who cared about me and wanted the best for me showed me what an important stage I'm entering."

2. CHALLENGE: A WOMANHOOD WALKABOUT

I wanted Simone to stretch herself physically and do something she had never done before to help her realize what she is truly capable of. So we set off on a walkabout

It's so easy to lament the lack of feminine rituals in our faith tradition. But instead of getting too weighed down over the discrepancy, I tried to use the absence to our advantage and recognized it as an opening to create our very own ritual.

through the Australian outback: five days in over 100 degree heat, hiking around the iconic red rock Uluru, fighting off flies, and sleeping in swags under the brilliant stars. It was tough, it was thrilling, it was transformative. And to get through it all, Simone discovered a well of strength she didn't know she had before. She shone with a new level of confidence. Along our journey, we learned about an Aboriginal snake goddess who created

the universe and explored initiation caves where girls became women. I saw Simone emerge as a young woman right before my very eyes.

The Australian outback was mesmerizing, but a womanhood walkabout could easily be done anywhere in the world — a long hike through a local state park or an adventurous trek through an urban setting — anything to help a young woman stretch her physical capacity and tap into her divine womanly strength.

3. CONTRIBUTION: A WAY TO EMPOWER OTHER YOUNG WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD

I wanted Simone to see her potential to be a force for good in the world. So I asked her to choose a cause she cared about, and it was no surprise she chose soccer. Simone loves kicking a ball and believes in the power of sports to change lives. Together we found an organization in rural India, called Yuwa, which works with girls at risk of child marriage and human trafficking. Through soccer and school, Yuwa empowers hundreds of girls to build character, achieve goals, and take control of their lives. Through her birthday celebrations, Simone raised hundreds of dollars to support their efforts. As part of our sabbatical, we spent a week in Ranchi, India, delivering our donations, playing soccer with an incredible group of girls, and witnessing these girls overcome immense barriers to reach their potential.

Global travel isn't necessary to be a force for good in the world. That can be cultivated in any community by identifying a cause your young woman cares about, researching local organizations who are working in that space, and creating ways to get involved.

CONCLUSION

It has been an extraordinary year for Simone and me as we've celebrated her entrance into young womanhood. We've reflected on our friends' words of wisdom, hiked through wild places, engaged in challenging social justice issues, and studied powerful quotes about Heavenly Mother. Simone is still a tween swimming in a sea of hormones, asserting her independence, and often causing a stir. And I'm still an imperfect mom who sometimes gets feisty and frustrated. But we have found that honoring Simone's twelfth year with thoughtful rituals and experiences has bonded us and equipped us to go through this transition with more grace and goodness. A mom and a daughter, connected and caring for each other along the path of womanhood. A celebration indeed.

ARTIST STATEMENT

My artistic process consists of the pictorial expression of concept through painting. It is through paint and the pictorial that I find the most interesting solutions and expressions of concept. And through the process of applying paint to a surface I am involved in history merging with tactile media and figurative imagery to construct something that can be both personal and universal.

My paintings address concerns of individuals within contemporary society such as identity, loss, mental illness, being female in a competitive world, the influence of the past on the present, and the connection between self image and social expectation.

Incurable, Unalterable, Final

REBEKAH ORTON

Lisa Van Orman Hadley's award-winning Irreversible Things explores and appreciates things that have been changed.

Irreversible Things by Lisa Van Orman Hadley, out now from Howling Bird Press, is part window, part magnifying glass, part flipping through the memory of an elegant, articulate brain. This collection of beautiful vignettes adds up to so much more than the sum of their parts, creating a novel memoir in a form so personal it will crack you open and make you hold your own irreversible things more dearly.

I shared the book, which follows Lisa from childhood to motherhood, with my fifteen-year-old daughter, Eliza, and when I say "share," I really mean "tracked down the book when she took it after I briefly set it down." Eliza and I sat down together to discuss Lisa's themes, artistry, and one-of-a-kind story structure.

Rebekah: What made you pick up *Irreversible Things* when you found it?

Eliza: It looked pretty. The cover has a tree on it, and usually books with trees on them are good.

R: (laughs)

E: There was also a cockroach on the cover, but I didn't realize that until later.

R: I think it's a cicada.

E: Cockroach, cicada — same thing. They're gigantic, creepy, disgusting bugs.

R: But one of them hides in the ground for 18 years.

E: That makes it scarier because you have to pay attention to when it's going to come out.

R: That's kind of what this book is about, isn't it? Paying attention to the little things that can't be undone that keep coming up to surprise you?

E: Maybe. I mean, in the book in the story "Irreversible Things" she pulls a cicada off of a tree, and she couldn't put it back on, so she was crying because she did something irreversible. Cicadas mate at the top of a tree, and if they can't get to the top of the tree, they die. So it's like the title of the book — it's irreversible.

R: Do you think she worried a lot about doing things that are irreversible?

E: Like, did she have irrational fears? No, not really. I don't think she was really scared of things that were irreversible, just kind of accepting.

R: But some of the irreversible things were sad — like when her dad started losing his memory.

E: Yeah. But "Making Sandwiches with My Father" when she was connecting with her dad was cool — it was just such a normal way for them to spend time together.

R: It kept them together; it was something familiar.

E: Yeah. I liked how she could appreciate when things were familiar. I could relate to a lot of the changes she went through: her move from Florida to Utah in "Leaving," and then when her neighbor died, and she started the story backwards and talked about the cat instead.

R: You think it was more familiar to think of a cat dying than a neighbor?

E: Well, maybe it's just the way she remembered it, like letting her mind ease into the memory.

R: It wasn't an easy memory.

E: I was confused when it said she found her cat Snowball dead under a bush, but then three paragraphs later the cat was alive. And then you realize the neighbor is dead, too.



R: She just kept a record.

E: She didn't put an opinion on it. A lot of books about growing up have one moment when things were different. Lisa never acknowledged that things were changing; they just were.

R: Do you think there was a moment when she noticed — maybe in "Curfew" when her dad asked when Lisa was coming home the night she got married and left for her honeymoon?

E: I don't know. I liked that we could imagine what the rest of the scene was like — what the mom said, and what the dad could remember.

R: I think Lisa let us think about what might be happening a lot. Like the choose-your-own-adventure part where you're not sure what she did with her grandma's hair in "The Wig" or when she had the blank spaces in "Women's Lib" — I thought about what to write in those sentences.

E: Mom, it was "The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe."

R: True, but I liked that you could put anything in the blank spaces — there are always so many things that you could put in those blank spaces, and then what you have crowds out all the other things that you could write there.

E: Or sometimes you can't write anything in the spaces even if you want to — like when she wanted babies in "Expecting."

R: That's true. During "Glass Flowers" and "Artifact" and "How to Draw a Body: Sketches with My Mother," I thought Lisa not being able to get pregnant was going to be one of those irreversible things.

E: And then once she did have babies, the children were irreversible — they were part of her, and then after they were born, they'd just keep getting older and growing up.

R: Hey, don't rush them — in "Names" at the end of the book they're still babies!

E: Not forever.

R: No. Not forever.

R: That was hard to read, but it was more comforting that way. She let you end with everyone alive.

E: It's an interesting twist. Your typical story doesn't go through the climax backward to end up at whatever started it all. Stories don't go the other direction.

R: I liked it. You can almost let yourself write a different story for everyone involved, like a do-over.

E: But you can't. The neighbor really died. It's another one of those irreversible things.

R: So are irreversible things bad?

E: No. Growing up is an irreversible thing. And the author didn't think that growing up was good or bad; she never really said anything either way.

THE PARLOR

LAURA MAROSTICA

The room makes a good first impression on its occupants, though most can't quite remember exactly when they sat down: airport windows, floor to ceiling. Non-airport carpet, plush and green.

Three sides of the room are lined with chairs fused at the arms. The chairs, which progress concentrically toward the middle of the room, are utilitarian but ergonomically sound. They are not adjustable, but many body types — and indeed, the widest spectrum of body types is visible here — can sit in reasonable comfort.

The chairs' occupants are mostly quiet, dressed alike in soft white t-shirts and drawstring black pants. No shoes. The loudest people are the old men, engineers and executives and truckers, sitting against the east wall, telling stories about wars and wives. They chuckle at their own jokes. The quietest people are the middle-aged women scattered throughout the room.

One of these, the deputy mayor of a midsize American city, is especially still, hands folded neatly in her lap, legs crossed at the ankles and tucked beneath her chair. She is seated beside a young man who tutored high school students in math. He is jiggling his knee and repeating a few phrases under his breath. The few women in their twenties — a journalist, a barista, and a refugee — have found enough space in the northwest corner for sun salutations. The deputy mayor watches their bodies roll from plank to upward and then downward dog. She is reminded of waves cresting on the beach.

The fourth side of the room accommodates a shiny black counter and a hallway leading to the right and left. Three figures emerge from the east hallway and stand behind the counter, smiling at the room. The math tutor quiets.

"Welcome," says the tallest, a black man resting his fingertips lightly on the counter, "to the Waystation. Though around here we mostly just call it the Way."

"You will have just a short stop here at the Way. Each person in this room will have a chance to meet with either me or one of my fellow...administrators," he gestures to a smiling blonde woman to his right and a square-

ARTIST STATEMENT

Warm family chairs sit in a cold atmosphere and tease with possibilities. Empty chairs invite you to join or witness that you weren't included. No horizon line symbolizes an earthly experience, something happening now, in the present, not in the past and not in the future.

jawed man to his left. "We will explain your group and your group's destination: A, B, or C. Once everyone has been oriented, you can make a quick stop at the Parlor, if you'd like. And then we'll all be moving on."

"It is normal to be nervous, but it is also important to remember that the destination where you've been placed is truly where you will be happiest and most comfortable, in the long term."

"And all three," says the smiling blonde, "are better and more beautiful than anywhere you've ever been."

As the three administrators call three names and are followed down the east hallway by the refugee, the oldest and loudest-chuckling broker, and a sharp-faced kindergarten teacher, slight movements resume in the group. The math tutor has begun tracing a figure eight around his two largest knuckles. "Silver glass," he whispers. "Swift sunrise."

The deputy mayor can no longer contain her curiosity. "I'm sorry. What are you saying?"

He turns to her with an embarrassed wave of the hand. His eyes are startlingly lovely. "Sorry. I get anxious even here, I guess. It's what Tolkien says — you know, about the afterlife. *'The grey rain-curtain turned all to silver glass...he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise.'*"

"Oh my," says the deputy mayor. "That does sound nice." She reaches down to pat the math tutor's knee, faintly aware that she would not have done this if she were still alive.

Some time later, after she has watched the wind ripple the grass beyond the window for a while, the deputy mayor's name is called alongside the barista and a tiny elderly

FICTION

E. Matthews

Japanese woman who has been gossiping lightly with her neighbor. She used to play golf professionally. "My knees are good as new!" she says brightly to the deputy mayor as they move to the hallway, and it's true — the deputy mayor's

*"Welcome," says the tallest,
a black man resting his
fingertips lightly on the
counter, "to the Waystation.
Though around here we
mostly just call it the Way."*

knees, her lower
back, her carpal
tunneled wrists
and forearms are
all free of ache.
Even her feet
are un-bunioned
as they sink into
the carpet.

They part at the
end of the east
hallway, each
disappearing

into a small office. The deputy mayor has been paired with the man who welcomed them. "Have a seat," he says warmly, gesturing to a large office chair in front of his desk. "We are so happy to have you. How are you feeling?"

She's pretty well. She can't complain. Confusion and anxiety are muffled here by a pleasant blanket of placidity.

He smiles. "I'm glad. Let's jump in then. As you've probably gathered by now," — he looks a little apologetic — "your mortal time has ended. Everyone at the Waystation today died on November 19th around 11 am. Had you learned about our destinations before, while you lived? And why we divide them the way we do?" She had heard of them in her mortal life, although she had never quite known how such a system would work. She wonders if Tolkien is in A, B, or C.

The administrator with his kind smile and bald head explains that the deputy mayor will be placed in B. "We're very proud of what you've done," he says reassuringly, "and we are confident this is where you belong. It looks like most of your people will probably be in B as well, when it's their time. You know how important families are to us."

"And my mother?" The deputy mayor has been waiting a long time to see her mother, who died long ago. The last time she saw her mother, the deputy mayor was a high school student body treasurer.

The administrator lets only the smallest of sighs escape. He covers her lined hand with his smooth one. "She's in A," he says. "It's her home. Can you see why that would be?"

Anguish extinguishes the warm haze around her. Her toes dig deep into the carpet. She searches for something to say.

The administrator looks at her and then behind him, to a door behind his desk reading "Staff Only." He looks hesitant for a moment, opens his mouth, catches himself, starts again. "Not all of us think — "

Then he gives his head a little shake and presses her hand. "This is why we have the Parlor," he says. "Find someone who's heading to A. People do it all the time."

It is brighter than she remembered in the window room. She relocates her seat and tucks up her knees beside the math tutor. "How'd it go?"

"A," he says. "You?"

"B." She looks at him. "I am...missing someone." She presses her lips together to still their trembling. The math tutor pats her shoulder a little clumsily.

"Will you go to the Parlor with me, before we leave?" she asks him. "I need to reach her, in A. Do you know if there's anyone in B, for you?"

"They don't know yet, since I'm the first of mine to die. But they mentioned there was a 'considerable likelihood' that...my brother would be going to B, eventually. So yeah, let's do it. Say the word."

She is going to miss the math tutor.

After not so long, but maybe quite long after all, the orientations are all complete, and the three administrators lead the November 19th late-morning cohort down the hallway to the west. In addition to the deputy mayor and the math tutor, there are a few other groups of twos and threes in consultation. The hallway curves gently up, pulling pleasantly at their calves.

It opens onto a new room. More windows, but no chairs. Three turnstiles shined to perfection lead to three moving sidewalks. The Parlor is a small room to the left, and unmistakable — it says "Parlor" in incongruous violet neon above the entry.

"Those of you who'd like to make use of the Parlor, our artist is ready for you," announces the smiling woman. "Those of you who are ready, pass through the turnstile that corresponds to your destination." She opens her arms to them. "Be well."

The deputy mayor and the math tutor shuffle toward the Parlor with a few dozen others. The artist meets them at the doorway, casually pulling her long black hair into a braid as she talks. "Come on in," she says briskly. "I'll explain quickly and then we'll get started. You've been talked at a lot already."

Each person finds a leather chair. These chairs recline, to everyone's pleasure. Beside the deputy mayor, the math tutor bounces lightly in his, his fingers tapping a drumbeat on the arms. The artist moves behind another shiny black counter.

"So," the artist clasps her hands lightly. "If you're here, you're hoping to leave a message for someone in another destination, where you can't go. But you know, time is different over there, and it turns out there's a lot of people to search through, when you're a carrier. So we like to use something that will last. And since you only bring your bodies..." She ducks beneath the counter and emerges with trays of ink and needles.

"I know it's a big, scary day. But here are some awesome things: when you do this at the Way, it doesn't even hurt. If you carry, you're helping out a friend. And guys, I'm really, really good. I'm the best." A few chuckles. "The only thing you need to decide on now is what and where you want your message to be. Have a chat with your carrier and write it down. It's usually best to use your own handwriting. Questions?"

The barista raises a tentative hand. "Any recommendations? On, um, content?"

The artist pauses to consider. "Be as specific to the person as you can. Try to remember something *they* will remember. 'Show not tell,' or whatever."

There are many consultations. The deputy mayor has already promised to carry for the tiny golfer and the loud broker, who are both going to C. But the math tutor comes first. Sometime between the waiting room and the Parlor, he has become her best friend. She feels she has known him for years; perhaps she has. They trust each other utterly.

The artist works quickly, the needle agile in her clever hands.

The deputy mayor stands in front of the glinting B turnstile. Her body, though in no pain, is the middle aged one she died in — wrinkles becoming webs; softness and slouch; coarse hair dulled with gray. Never has she felt so lovely.

On behalf of the golfer, she has a row of Japanese characters winding down from her inner right bicep to the outer knob of her wrist. ("I bet you feel so cool now, eh?" the artist had said to the deputy mayor in the Parlor with a wink). The message is for the golfer's father. She described him but declined to translate the message.

On behalf of the broker, she has a tiny scene of Stevie Wonder astride a motorcycle on her left clavicle. "For my best friend," he'd said, quieter now. "I hope he gets it."

And on the soft, soft skin of the deputy mayor's left inner forearm, the artist has inked the math tutor's boyish scrawl. "If you could find my brother," he'd said. "I don't think he'd really like the 'show not tell' idea. It might be a long time before he comes." *Don't forget the dock at Cape Cod or Jurassic Park. We'll meet again.*

She waits for the math tutor's last tattoo to be complete. He is popular, carrying much; not many from the group are going to A. He emerges from the Parlor with ink twining up both arms, pouring across his narrow chest. He has birds on his feet from the barista and inside jokes encircling his ankles. *Portia, Forgive me* is carefully printed on his right ring finger.

The message for the deputy mayor's mother begins behind his left shoulder and follows his uppermost back: a map of the walk they took together every Saturday when she was small. Past the house with the red mailbox, uphill to the park, along the little stream to greet the ducks, and into the nature center with the beautiful yellow snake and the cold, cold drinking fountain. His skin is freckled, and long pale hairs feather her map. It is the most beautiful thing she has ever seen.

"Thank you," the deputy mayor says to the math tutor as they stand in front of their turnstiles. The warm muffling placidity has lifted — she feels sorrow, and a little bit of joy. To her right, the golfer is preparing to step through to C. "My mother will love it."

He nods. He'll find her. They step forward, softly pushing through to the walkway beyond.



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